

Circular Letter No. 501.

To Superintendents.

Gentlemen:--

I am sending you herewith a treatise on English graded work, which I trust will be of value to you in establishing and extending this part of our school organization.

Respectfully yours,

EDWIN G. DEXTER
Commissioner of Education

eral rule comparatively young women make the best teachers because they are more likely to be adaptable and willing to take suggestions than older women or than men. Fully half of the graded teachers of Porto Rico approach nearly enough the type described to make it entirely possible for them to become English graded teachers for the lower grades. There are a number of ways to aid them to do this, most of which may be used simultaneously. The first necessity is practice in speaking and the best way to have this begun is to furnish the teachers with lists of class-room orders and directions and to forbid the giving of any of the routine orders of the school in Spanish. In a few days the children learn the new commands and like them, and the teachers gets valuable practice and rapidly gains in confidence. Practice classes under the supervision of the American teachers are of great assistance, not only to teach English but as a valuable means for teaching methods. Very soon the teacher may begin to teach some one subject, preferably English reading, entirely in English. Memory Work and Spelling at once follow, and Arithmetic, especially in a low grade, will not be found difficult. Talking and writing to the teachers in English and sending out all circular letters in that language are helps. By beginning in this way remarkable progress can be made. After one or more classes are in successful operation the other teachers should be sent to visit them to observe the methods.

Of course one of the greatest sources of supply, and one from which come some of the best prepared teachers, is the Normal School, many of whose recent graduates are now teaching with marked success in English grades. Another fact which it may be interesting to know is that there is not the slightest difficulty in persuading teachers to take up the new work with enthusiasm and to devote more attention than ever to their schools even if they do not receive the extra pay and have no immediate hope of doing so.

One of the most profound impressions which forces itself upon the Superintendent who undertakes grade work in English is that he has taken hold of a proposition which is new and different from anything he has met here or in the States. He soon finds that the new conditions demand new treatment, and that many of the pedagogical principles laid down in books do not hold, and that if he would make a success he, himself, must prepare his work more carefully than the teachers prepare theirs.

After the work has been once started no great experience will be necessary thoroughly to convince him that there are three fundamental rules which must be followed by all teachers.

First: The teacher must speak very slowly. This means, especially at the beginning, very slowly indeed; so much so that it may become almost painful to listen to her. It is a part of this same rule that she should say comparatively little and use short sentences. A criticism which has often been made and which covers the cases of most teachers who are new to the work and of nearly all American teachers, is that, "The teacher speaks too loud, too fast, too much, and too much at a time."

Second: The teacher must remember that the secret of distinct

pronunciation in English lies in the clear enunciation of the last letter or syllable of each word. If the last syllable be distinctly pronounced the rest will practically take care of itself. Every word must be spoken very distinctly.

Third: The form of the question must not be changed. If a question is to be repeated, the same form must be used. This is the secret of the success of the good Porto Rican teachers in low grades, and of the relative failure in many cases of the American teachers. The American teacher in trying to teach a conversation lesson about a picture says, "Tell me something you see", and as the child does not quite understand, she continues, "What do you see?" "Tell us what you see," "What is it you see?" "What does the girl see?" "Now tell me what the girl see?" As may readily be imagined, these changes so confuse the child that he does not understand what is wanted, or if at last he does so, he grasps only the key word and not the whole sentence. A good Porto Rican teacher giving the same lesson asks, "What - do - you - see - in - the - picture?" Perhaps this form of the question is the only one she knows, or, at any rate, she may not be quite sure of other forms, so she keeps on repeating the same question until the child understands and answers. As a result the pupil probably understands not only the word see but all the rest of the sentence. This matter is far more important than may appear upon first consideration.

If it is a fact that the Porto Rican teacher, to be successful in his work, must be one possessing certain abilities and characteristics, it is no less true that the same principle holds for American teachers who are to be put in charge of grades.

Perhaps no single point has been demonstrated more clearly in this work than the advisability of the putting the lower grades in charge of Porto Rican teachers and the upper ones in charge of American teachers. Strange as it may seem, it is a fact that a Porto Rican teacher will generally teach more English to a second grade in one year than will an American teacher, and it is equally true that the American will almost invariably do better in the upper grades. Very few Porto Rican teachers have a sufficient command of English to warrant their undertaking the instruction of any grade above the third. In the lower grades the child should learn to understand, to read, and to write simple English, and in the upper grades he should perfect and extend this knowledge and learn to converse fluently and understand ordinary conversational English as used by Americans. The division should come at the beginning of the fourth or fifth grade.

As before mentioned, many pedagogical principles accepted as standard prove untenable when applied to this new work. One of the most striking failures is in the matter of giving directions to teachers. Giving the teacher the greatest possible latitude and leaving her untrammelled to work out her own application of her own ideas seems to be a certain way to assure failure. The clearer, the more definite, and more detailed instructions given to teachers, the better will be the results.

The various class-room orders and directions to the pupils may from the first be given in English, and the use of these constantly recurring expressions will aid both teachers and pupils in

acquiring other and more difficult expressions. The following class-room orders may well be adopted by all teachers:

Call the roll in the morning and have each child answer "Present."

Stand up.
Sit down.
Face front.
Sit still.
Stop talking.
Take good position.
Raise your hands.
Stand in the aisle.
Do not lean on the desk.
Open your books.
Close your books.
Hold your book in your hand.
Take your books.
Put away your books.
Put your books into your desks.
Put your pencils, erasers, books and papers in their places.
Who can tell me? Raise your hands.
You may leave the room.
Do not whisper.
Take the chalk.
Write on the black-board.
Take an eraser.
Clean the black-board.
Write a sentence on the board about _____.
Erase the sentence.

The following practical suggestions for beginning grade work in English are largely adapted from a paper read by one of our successful teachers at the Teachers' Institute, held in Ponce in May, 1906.

Suppose that a teacher faces for the first time a group of children who do not know a single word of English. She is to use as a basis for her first lesson the word "pencil", following the principle that it is always best to begin with the names of familiar objects and especially of objects used in the school-room. Standing in front of the pupils, in plain sight of all she repeats slowly and clearly the word "pencil", perhaps three times. If possible, each child should be made to pronounce the word; then it should be written on the black-board, the word being spelled by the teacher and written by one or more of the children, or by the teacher, in case none of the children knows how to write. Then the children may be asked to point to the written word "pencil"; sometimes it is helpful if the word be written several times, using different colored crayons.

After reaching this point the teacher should for the first time show the pencil to the class, putting it on the table or in some place where it can easily be seen by the pupils. Pointing to it, she should say "That is a pencil", and immediately ask "What is that?" leaving the children to answer "That is a pencil". This question should be repeated many times by the teacher, and answered

by as many of the children as possible.

It may be argued by some that the object should be taught before the pronunciation, reading and writing of the word, but it is doubtful if as good results are obtained in this way as in the way outlined above. In practice the best plan has proved to be to teach first and simultaneously the pronunciation, reading and writing of the word, showing the object after its name has been learned.

After the sentence "That is a pencil" has been practiced orally it should be written on the blackboard. It should be read to the pupils repeatedly, and it should be used as a writing exercise, making them copy it a number of times. Following the same system the teacher may proceed to teach the names of some of the other familiar objects of the schoolroom. In the same way, after the children have learned the names of a number of these objects, corresponding sentences should be introduced, as "That is a book", "That is a desk", "That is a rose", etc.

From the teaching of the names of familiar objects let us take up the problem of teaching the names of the colors. Suppose we decide to begin with the color yellow. Care must be taken to avoid pronouncing the English word "color" like the Spanish word of the same spelling, "color". If this is not understood by pronunciation, write it on the blackboard. Most of the children of the second grade readily distinguish colors. After asking the question "What color is this pencil?" the teacher should answer "That pencil is yellow", and then make the children repeat the sentence, read it and copy it as a writing exercise. Next the children may be asked to point to all of the yellow objects that they see. If the teaching up to this point has been thorough we may expect from the children the following sentences, for they have already learned the necessary words: "That pencil is yellow", "That dress is yellow", etc. Exercises such as these will prove useful not only in fixing new words in the minds of the children, but in enlarging their vocabulary.

As steps immediately following, the expressions "I have", "Give me", "I see", etc. may be introduced and sentences formed, using these expressions in conjunction with the words already learned.

In this connection it must be remembered that to a considerable extent the progress of the children depends upon the form which the daily preparation of work takes. The plan for the language lesson for any given day should include preparation, and review of the lesson of the preceding day, presentation of the lesson of the day and the summing up and reviewing of the principles points of both before the end of the period. After the children have mastered something of a vocabulary we may add still another part to the daily plan which might be termed "comparison" and which consists of a lesson in comparing the object which has been used as a basis for the lesson of the day with some other object already known to the children, mentioning the points that they have in common and their differences. This can be done only after the children have learned quite thoroughly such words as "large", "small", "hard", "soft", "long", "short", etc.

These words should be taught objectively. In teaching "large"

and "small" for example, the children should be made to see the difference in size between two or more children or objects. The words "hard" and "soft" by trying to make them see that it is the quality of hardness and not the names of the objects which is under consideration. Then a number of other hard objects should be touched, and a number of soft ones, and at the same time the words "hard" and "soft" should be used appropriately. With little trouble we can make the children use such sentences as "The ball is hard", "The ball is soft", etc.

Very often it will be found that actions must be introduced to aid in the teaching of new words. If, for example, we wish to teach the word "stand" and tell a child to stand up, at the same time making such a gesture that he will understand what is wanted, he will not only stand up, but after one or two trials he will learn a new word. It should be constantly borne in mind that a new idea is much more firmly fixed in the mind of a child if he obtains the concept by impressions through doing an action or seeing an object than if he gets it from translation. In this connection it may be mentioned that the use of dictionaries should never be permitted in the lower grades.

Verbs should be taught whenever possible by the action method. The teacher should first go through the action and then make a number of the children imitate her. When a child is going through the action he should be asked what he is doing, with the object of getting him to use a sentence containing the verb which is being taught. Thus the new word will be firmly fixed in the mind of the child. The teacher should be careful however at this stage not to ask one child what another is doing, for the answer would necessitate the use of the verb in the third person singular, and would thus introduce puzzling new forms.

The first person singular of the verb "to have" may be taught by using the expression "I have" in conjunction with the names of objects which are familiar to the children, as for example, "I have a ball", "I have a desk", "I have a pencil", etc. In a similar way the third person of the same verb may be taught. Practice has proved that the best way to teach the difference between "have" and "has" is to practice and teach incessantly, until the children themselves get to understand the difference between the two forms. This is done by the use of such exercises as the following: "Mary, take this pencil." "What has Mary?" "Mary has a pencil." "Give the pencil to John." "What has John?" "John has a pencil." "Who has the pencil?" "John has the pencil." These exercises should be repeated with as many children as possible, and finally the child will come to understand that when he refers to himself he must use the form "have", and when he refers to a third person he must use the form "has". Later on the form "have" for the second person may be taught in the same way. Children who are able to write may be given written exercises in which they are asked to fill in the blanks in such sentences as "I _____ a desk", and "Mary _____ a doll".

In a similar way it is through practice and repetition that we must teach the difference between the forms "is" and "are", for in the lower grades attempts to explain the grammatical differences are absolutely useless, besides being very confusing to the children. Suppose we wish to teach the word "is". An exercise like the

following will be found useful: "This is Mary." "Who is this?" "That is Henry". "Who is that boy?" "That boy is John" Through many repetitions the pupils will finally learn and understand the use of the word "is". A number of the sentences used in this exercise should be copied, and in them the word "is" should be underlined.

In a similar way the word "are" should be taught. This will be found much more difficult because "are" is used for both singular and plural. An exercise like the following will be found useful: "Who is this boy?" "That boy is John!" "Who is this boy?" "That boy is Henry" "Who are these boys?" The children should be left to answer: "Those boys are John and Henry".etc. The use of the word "are" in the singular may be taught in a similar way by forming sentences with the word, so that finally the children will come to realize that it may be used both in the plural and in the singular. For instance, the children should be encouraged to speak to their companions as follows: "You are John," at the same time pointing to the boy being spoken to. The word in its plural form may be taught in the same way by pointing to a group of boys and saying "You are boys", or to girls and saying "You are girls", etc. A similar difficulty will be found in teaching the use of the words "was" and "were", but in this case we have also to meet the added difficulty of making the children understand that the words refer to something which has occurred.

This will be found to be no easy task, but nevertheless it is one which can be accomplished by a good teacher in an ordinary second grade. An exercise something like the following may be used: The teacher takes a book and gives it to a pupil and says "I give you the book." "What do I give you?" "You give me the book." "Give me the book." "What do you give me?" "I give you the book." Then leaving the book in the hands of the child the teacher says "Who gave you the book?" "You gave me the book." "Give the book to Antonio" "Who gave you the book?" "Domingo gave me the book." The same exercise must be gone through with a number of times with different pupils. At the beginning, "Give" should be taught on one day and "gave" on another day. They should not be taken up together. Written exercises should be given and sentences containing the verb written on the blackboard.

In all of this work in the lower grades, object lessons are of the greatest importance and will be found useful in helping the children to gain facility of speech and in adding new words to their vocabulary, although the value of these lessons is to a large degree dependent upon the care and thought with which they are prepared by the teacher. Another device which will be found useful is the use of pictures. They have the great advantage of attracting the interest of a child from the very beginning, and very many words and expressions can be taught by their use. Each child sees something that interests him personally, and he wants to tell about it, and that in a way different from the way it is told by his companions.

In all of the grades, dictation exercises should be used. At first they should contain no more than one or two short sentences, made up of easy and familiar words. In the latter part of the second grade work however, longer sentences, composed of more difficult words, may be introduced. The words incorrectly written by the children should form the basis for a separate lesson, the child being required to re-write the word and to form sentences containing it, so that he may be sure that he not only knows how to write the word itself, but understands its meaning

and use.

Perhaps in the third term of the second grade short compositions which are really descriptions of an object or a picture should be written. At first this will have to be very simple indeed and perhaps the outline will have to be indicated by the teacher. This work may be taken up in the form of having the children answer a number of questions about a single object. For instance, they may be asked to describe an orange, but instead of simply giving this as an assignment the teacher should write on the board questions such as the following: "What do you see?" "What color is it?" "Where is it?" "Is it large or small?" "Is it round or square?" "Do you like it?" "Can you eat it?"

Of course in all of this teaching of language, arithmetic work must not be forgotten. Here we encounter a good many difficulties which can be overcome only by patience and persistent repetition. In the first place it must be remembered that objects must be used constantly. On the first day the number "one" should be taught. The teacher should pronounce the word "one" and make the children repeat it. Then the idea of unity should be given by means of impressions of some well known object, perhaps a pencil. The teacher may begin the work somewhat as follows: "What is this?" "Show me one pencil," "How many pencils?" The answer will be "One pencil," for as yet the children know of no other way to answer, unless they say "That is one pencil." Upon reaching this point the teacher should pass to the writing of the number, saying "This is 1," "What is this?" "Write 1," "Read 1." In a similar way the succeeding numbers may be introduced.

According to some pedagogical authorities the four fundamental operations should be taught at the same time, but experience shows that this rule does not hold good when the difficulties of a new and unknown language are added to those of the subject itself. If, for instance, we try to introduce the word and the idea of "less" on the same day that we undertake to teach the word "and" or "plus" we are only too apt to find that the result in the mind of a child is merely confusion. Experience teaches that more is accomplished by working with addition alone until its vocabulary has been well mastered, then passing on to subtraction. When the ideas and words of subtraction are fairly well mastered we may undertake multiplication and division. In teaching addition it will be found very useful from the language point of view to insist on the analysis of simple problems from the beginning and on the use of complete and correct sentences in answering the questions. For instance, if the problem is "John has 7 cents and Mary has 3 cents; how many cents have both?" the answer should be "If John has 7 cents and Mary has 3 cents, both have 10 cents." In order to teach the children to answer in this way it will be necessary at first for the teacher to give or write the answer, as follows: "If John has -- cents and Mary has -- cents, both have -- cents."

An exercise similar to the following may be used for beginning work in arithmetic: Count these balls," "How many balls are there?" "There are four balls" "Count by 2's", "2, 4", "How many 2's are there in 4?" "There are 2 2's in 4," "Listen! 2 times 2 are 4," "How many are 2 times 2?" "How many balls are 2 times 2 balls?" "How many pencils are 2 times 2 pencils?" "How many cents are 2 times 2 cents?" "This is times-x." "Read it," "Write it." "I write 2 x 2,"

"Write 2×2 ," "Write 2×2 are 4," As a written exercise, " 2×2 are --", " $2 \times --$ are 4," etc.

Division may be taken up somewhat as follows: "Count these marbles." "How many marbles are there here?" "There are four marbles here." "Put the marbles into 2's," "Give 2 marbles to John," "How many marbles has Mary?" "How many marbles has John?" "4 divided into 2's is how many 2's?" "Look! this is divided by --." "Read it," "Write it," "I write $4 \div 2$ equals 2," "Write $4 \div 2$ equals 2."

In the teaching of fractional parts it is best to begin with $1/2$. The teacher takes an orange and cuts it into two equal parts. She then tells the children that each part is one-half. The word "half" is introduced as follows: "Count the parts," "1, 2" "This is $1/2$," "Show me $1/2$ ", Make the children divide various objects into two equal parts, and make them name each part, saying the word "half". Then show how the fraction is written and make the children read it and write it repeatedly. Now that the child has an idea that one-half is one of two equal parts into which a thing may be divided it is easy for him to form two equal groups from four balls, and if he has been well taught he can at this point give one-half of four balls if asked to do so.

In taking up elementary arithmetic, the great value of oral exercises must not be overlooked, for these develop the child's power to reason quickly and give him facility in the use of the English language. Such exercises as the following are valuable: "Count by 5 to 25," "Count backwards from 25 to 5", "How many 5's make 25?" "What is $1/5$ of 25?" " $1/5$ of a number is 5, what is the number?" "Mary has 10 cents and Peter has 15 cents, how many cents have both?" All of this may appear tiresome, but all beginnings are difficult and tiresome and in this work, as in perhaps any other, success depends on thorough trial and repetition during the early stages.